

BRIEFING TO DEPUTY MINISTER ON MINISTERIAL CORRESPONDENCE

WITH CHRIS BROWN REGARDING ENVIRONMENTAL HYPERSENSITIVITY

Background

- Mr. Chris Brown of the Advocacy Group for the Environmentally Sensitive has written to the Minister on several occasions since April 1986, concerning environmental hypersensitivity. In at least two of his letters, he also refers to previous correspondence and numerous meetings with officials of the Minister's office on this topic over the last 25 years.
- Mr. Brown is engaged in a quite successful campaign to bring environmental hypersensitivity to the attention of both levels of government and has written seeking support for his cause to a number of other federal Ministers as well as to the Ontario Ministry of Health on many occasions. He would like some form of recognition of the disease and acceptance of the findings of the Thomson Report on Environmental Hypersensitivity, commissioned in late 1984 by the Ontario Ministry of Health to examine the whole question of environmental hypersensitivity, including the need for financial support through the health care system.
- Because chemicals in the environment are often referred to as the cause(s) of environmental hypersensitivity, also called total allergy syndrome or 20th century disease, the Environmental Health Directorate undertook a preliminary review of the Thomson Report. The report pointed out that there had been considerable controversy within the medical profession over whether environmental hypersensitivity was bona fide disease. One of the basic findings was that the disease existed, but that little was known either of its cause(s) or prevalence. Other findings and recommendations concerned the need for more research, more education of both medical personnel and the public, and the degree of financial aid and medical coverage to be given by the provincial government. The report has not been reviewed by qualified medical personnel within the Department.

Relevant Factors

- The Department of National Health and Welfare has responsibility for the presence of food additives and pesticide residues in food. Sulfite additives were cited on at least one occasion by Mr. Brown as being responsible for the death of someone with environmental hypersensitivity.
- Federal responsibilities also include health care for federal employees. The Medical Services Branch has been asked to provide medical certification for a full disability pension to a federal employee on the basis of debilitating illness caused by environmental hypersensitivity.

Suggested Departmental Position

- The Department should continue to regard most questions concerning the diagnosis, treatment and costs pertaining to medical illness as a provincial responsibility. In the case of federal employees, some decisions may have to be made on the validity of medical claims after review of the scientific data, as presented in the Thomson Report and elsewhere by qualified medical personnel within the Department.
- The Department is already engaged in and will continue measures to control human exposure to synthetic chemicals in food, air and water, through legislation under the Food and Drugs Act and the Environmental Contaminants Act. In addition, health advice is given to other departments who have the legislative responsibility for other Acts, such as the Clean Air Act.

Health Protection Branch
November 6, 1986